

The Christian News-Letter

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DEAR MEMBER,

The deliberateness of the attempt to exterminate the Jews in Europe gives it an infamous pre-eminence among the horrors which are being enacted in the world to-day. It is a crime not against the Jews alone, but against mankind; in this act of calculated inhumanity human nature itself is degraded and desecrated.

THE MASSACRE OF JEWS

The Nazi attack on the Jews did not begin yesterday, but ten years ago. Christians in all countries were slow to perceive what was at stake. There was no storm of protest such as these flagrant affronts to the rights and dignity of man and violations of the laws of God might have been expected to evoke. But sympathy with the victims found expression in this country in the setting up in 1938 of the Christian Council for Refugees and in Lord Baldwin's appeal for funds. There are at present 90,000 refugees in Great Britain, the majority of whom are Jews. Large sums of money have been contributed for their maintenance and welfare from both government and voluntary sources.

When Poland was occupied, the Jews in that country and eastern Europe were herded into ghettos at Warsaw, Lublin and other places, and these are now being systematically emptied of all except a few highly skilled workers required for war industries; none of those taken away are ever heard of again. In the words of the declaration of the Governments of the United Nations made last December, the able-bodied are slowly worked to death in labour camps, and the infirm left to die of exposure and starvation or deliberately massacred in mass executions; the number of victims of these bloody cruelties is reckoned in many hundreds of thousands of entirely innocent men, women and children.

The tragedy was brought forcibly to public attention by the brutal measures adopted for the deportation of Jews from Vichy France. Full accounts appeared in the press and are supported by the evidence of well-known and credible eye-witnesses.

The policy of eliminating the Jewish population is being systematically carried out in all the occupied countries. During the past six months the deportation of Jews, under the inhuman conditions already described, has been steadily proceeding from Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Czechoslovakia to eastern Europe. In Yugoslavia and Serbia the Jewish population has been practically exterminated.

THE JEWISH PROBLEM

The recital of these barbarities evoked in Parliament and in the nation an instinctive wave of sympathy, as in the scene in the House of Commons when the members stood in silent protest. But in the curious way in which our minds work, the natural reaction to such acts of inhumanity is in many people inhibited, or at least confused, by the fact that the victims are Jews. They are vaguely aware of a difficult and unsolved Jewish problem. Many have had experience of offensive behaviour on the part of Jews (as, let us always remember, Jews have had of more terrible behaviour on the part of those who call themselves Christians), without the compensating experience which many of us enjoy of counting among our friends Jews of an exceptionally fine and Christ-like character. There is often present also the unexamined feeling that, inexcusable as are the methods of the Nazis, their desire to get rid of the Jews must have some grounds.

Let us face these questions frankly, and be clear where we stand. There is a difficult Jewish problem.¹ But there is one fundamental question which has to be settled first. Do we want it to be solved by murder, as the Nazis are trying to solve it, or are we determined to deal with it as rational, civilized human beings?

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

In their declaration the Governments of the United Nations limited themselves to re-affirming the resolve of all freedom-loving peoples to overthrow the Hitlerite tyranny and their own solemn resolution that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution. The hesitating replies of the Foreign Secretary to questions about the possibility of constructive measures of relief were described by Major-General Sir Neill Malcolm in a letter to *The Times* as a "terrible anti-climax"; it appeared that, "unlike Hitler, we cannot convert words into deeds and must be content with promises that will not save one single life."

In the past few weeks there has been a strong rally of public opinion, in which the Christian Churches have taken a vigorous initiative, in favour of the adoption of every possible means of affording rescue. An appeal was addressed to the Government by the Archbishops of Canterbury, York and Wales in the name of the whole Anglican Episcopate, and supported by letters from the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. A meeting—the first of its kind in Scottish history—between representatives of the Scottish Churches and of Scottish Jewry was held in January; resolutions were passed and a Continuation Committee set up. Strong representations have been made to the Government by the recently formed Council of Christians and Jews, which has a weighty membership. An all-party meeting of members of both Houses of Parliament appointed a deputation to interview the Ministers concerned, and has tabled a motion in the Commons, signed by over 200 members. It declares that the House assures his Majesty's Government of its fullest support for immediate measures, on the largest and most generous scale compatible with the requirements of military operations and security, for providing help and temporary asylum to persons in danger of massacre who are able to leave enemy and enemy-occupied countries. The other resolutions already mentioned follow the same general line, urging two main points: first, that the Government should grant temporary asylum in their own territories and those under their control to all who can escape, and, secondly, that the United Nations should give assurances to the Governments of neutral countries in which refugees seek sanctuary, of present financial assistance and food supplies, where these are necessary, and pledge themselves to provide for the ultimate settlement of these refugees in the post-war period.

The chief possibility of rendering immediate assistance is in Spain, where there are to-day about 12,000 refugees, half of whom are Jewish and the rest fugitives of different nationalities from the Nazi terror.

The Government has recently announced that arrangements have been made for the admission into Palestine of 4,000 Jewish children accompanied by 500 adults, and of a smaller number from Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary, and have agreed in principle to the extension of the number up to the limits of the immigrant certificates already approved.

LONG TERM POLICIES

The possibilities of immediate relief while the war continues are pitifully small. But what the facts demand from us is not a transient response but dedication to a life-long task. It is only in this larger context that acts of immediate succour find their true motive and full significance. The challenge we have to meet is in the invisible region of the spirit. Flagrant inhumanity can be countered only by a strong reaffirmation of our humanity. It is to that great spiritual task that we are committed.

¹ An excellent statement of the problem was given by Dr. James Parkes in the Supplement to C.N.L. No. 102.

This is in its nature a long-term programme. The re-settlement and rehabilitation of the great numbers who have been uprooted from their surroundings and driven from their homes is a vast problem, for which a solution can be found only by careful planning, thorough preparation and close international co-operation. The problem of refugees is, as we have seen, a double one. It is in part a Jewish problem, and in part a much wider one ; and the two have to be considered separately, though they to some extent overlap.

It is of the utmost importance that in their plans for post-war reconstruction the Governments of the United Nations should give early and full consideration, in consultation with the leaders of the Jewish community, to the whole problem of the future of the Jews after the war. This includes not only provision for Jewish refugees, but many wider problems, such as the protection of minorities in European countries, the social and economic rehabilitation of the Jews still in Europe, areas of possible settlement outside Europe, the burning issue of Palestine and, not least, the re-education of Christian opinion.

But among the long-term refugees there are also hundreds of thousands who are not Jews. Many of these, though by no means all, may be able to return after the war to the countries from which they came, but even these will need assistance in re-establishing themselves. It is much to be desired that the Governments of the United Nations should make an early declaration that international assistance to long-term refugees has a definite place in their post-war reconstruction programme, and that they intend to seek a solution along the three major roads of (a) repatriation, with necessary safeguards, to the country of origin, (b) social and legal absorption into the countries in which refuge has been sought, and (c) settlement in countries overseas, either by infiltration immigration or by mass settlement. Such a declaration, if it were comprehensive in its scope, would greatly encourage countries like Sweden, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal, which have generously admitted refugees, to keep their doors open while the war continues.

THE SUFFERING OF EUROPE

The treatment of the Jews is so wanton in its cruelty, so naked and unashamed in its inhumanity, that to fail to meet it with such counter-action as is open to us would be to share in the degradation of humanity. But the sufferings of the Jews cannot be isolated from the sufferings of the peoples of Europe as a whole, some account of which has been given in previous News-Letters. We may add the following more recent particulars. The British Paediatric Association, a body of physicians engaged in child medicine, gave in a letter to *The Times* the following account of conditions in Greece :—

“ The condition of the Greek children is terrible beyond words. An eye-witness has described children in Athens as ‘ without strength to beg ’ ; one child said, ‘ I have lost my mother, she died of hunger ; my brother died last night because we have not eaten anything for four days.’ The Athens Welfare Service reports that nine out of ten babies die before they reach the age of six months.”

In the same issue Dr. Howard E. Kershner, Director of Relief under the American Friends Service Committee, wrote :—

“ I have seen the childhood of Southern France practically stop growing and a large percentage of it seriously lose weight. Many children have lost their memory and learn nothing in the schools. Many are kept in bed to conserve their strength. For lack of clothing many go to school only on warm days and on alternate days wearing each other’s clothing.”

In Belgium the conditions are perhaps even worse. In none of the occupied countries is the food available sufficient to keep children in health, while in many instances it is insufficient to keep them alive.

The problem of relief for the famine-stricken populations of Europe is, of course, quite distinct from that of providing an asylum for those who can escape from the clutches of the Axis Powers, and presents different problems to the Government. The connection between the two is that every positive act in the relief of suffering contributes to the

victory over dehumanizing influences, just as certainly as in the war victories on one front reinforce those fighting on other fronts. Compassion is not a fixed quantity, the supply of which may become exhausted ; it works by contagion and fermentation.

It would, of course, be foolish to divert to the relief of symptoms the energies that are necessary for the removal of the root of the evil by the destruction of the Nazi tyranny. The United Nations can take no action which an utterly unscrupulous enemy could exploit to his military advantage. But within these limits there is a very strong case for sympathetic consideration by the Government of the scheme submitted by the Famine Relief Committee for the relief of children up to sixteen years of age and of nursing and expectant mothers in Belgium. The proposal, which has been carefully devised to meet real difficulties, is that 2,000 tons a month of vitamin capsules and dried milk should be brought from America in neutral shipping at the cost of the Belgian Government, and that further similar aid should be extended to Greece. Such help might in many cases make all the difference between temporary and irreparable injury to health.

IS IT WORTH WHILE ?

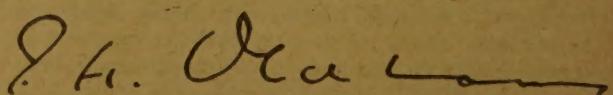
The scale of the suffering paralyses us. It is easy to turn aside from possibilities of action on the ground that they do not solve the problem, but only touch its barest fringe. But when conscience and humanity are outraged the response must be the exact opposite ; however little we can do, we must at all costs do the utmost that we can. If we cannot save thousands, let us save hundreds, or even one.

There are few matters on which the teaching of the Gospels is so explicit and insistent. The one act of which Jesus said that it would be held in recollection wherever the Gospel was preached throughout the whole world was that of a woman who had done what she could. The Samaritan is praised because at the sight of suffering he was moved by compassion to give every help in his power. In what is perhaps the most striking of all his parables, Jesus asserted that small, unremembered acts of kindness have a cosmic meaning ; service to the helpless would be reckoned at the last day as done to Himself.

What is important for the future is not how much can be immediately achieved, but whether regenerative forces are actively at work. The prize which is at stake is the recovery in the life of mankind of those qualities of compassion, responsibility for one another, constructive skill and redemptive conquest of evil which make us men.

Do Christians understand this ? A member of Parliament tells me that, while he and his colleagues are receiving shoals of letters about the opening of theatres on Sundays, he has had in three months only one letter expressing Christian concern about the fate of the Jews in Europe. I am not suggesting that the question of Sunday theatres is unimportant ; but the proportion of the letters points to an enfeebled understanding of the vital meaning and central task of Christianity. "Put on, as God's elect, a heart of compassion, kindness." "Be ye merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful." The great mission of Christianity in the present plight of mankind is, through the power of faith and in the spirit of the Gospel, to unseal the springs of pity and mercy, through the exercise of which men realize their kinship with God.

Yours sincerely,



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